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ABSTRACT

Upon the request of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), Florida State University (FSU) is required to enact a program designed to graduate students with a certain degree of oral communication competency. While communication majors and minors are required to enroll in a public speaking course, no student at FSU has the option in enrolling in a "Fundamentals of Communication" course. The needs of various sub-populations at FSU should be considered: the SACS, university administrators, the Department of Communication, faculty, teaching assistants, first-time students, students already attending FSU, transfer students, communication majors and minors, and special needs students. Some alternative approaches implemented at colleges and universities across the nation are Oral Communication across the Curriculum, communication laboratories, and large lecture sections taught by faculty members and lab sections taught by teaching assistants. While each of these strategies has its own merits, none adequately meet the intended goals of providing orally competent students. The Department of Communication should revise its course offerings to include a "Fundamentals of Communication" course--a hybrid course that includes general communication theory, interpersonal communication, group communication, and public speaking. Majors and minors in Communication will be required to enroll in a three-credit course taught by faculty. Other students will have the option of a two-credit class. The inclusion of a mandatory fundamental communication class at Florida State University would be pan-beneficial. The University would produce graduates better prepared to handle the complexities of today's communication age and would recognize the benefits of meeting the accreditational standards established by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. (Contains 24 references.) (RS)

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ED 412 573

"Identifying Institutional Variances: A FSU Proposal"

by Tom Scott and Sydne Kasle

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Communication at Florida State University is faced with a unique situation. Upon the request of the **Southern Association of Colleges and Schools**, Florida State University must enact a program designed to graduate students with a certain degree of oral communication competency. This mandate is monumental in that historically Speech Communication has been an undervalued discipline.

> The place of speech communication as a discipline in American Education has never been universally understood, appreciated or accepted. Since the early years of the twentieth century, speech teachers have engaged in a constant battle of recognition and acceptance of their courses, their research and their general academic credibility. (Taylor 1)

While not perceived as a critical area of academic instruction,

> The last fifteen years of instructional communication has become increasingly focused in defining and assessing 'oral communication competency' among students in public schools, colleges, and universities. Part of the effort by instructional communication researchers to study oral communication competency stems from a general effort by the educational systems to become more accountable for their curriculum choices. (Dilemma 3)

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Many of the institutions responsible for establishing accrediting standards of colleges and universities are examining the role of oral competency in creating respectable graduates. A survey of regional accrediting agencies cites Northern accrediting agencies with little or no interest in imposing accreditation standards upon their member schools. Accrediting agencies in the Southern, Middle and Western states, however, have included goals of oral competence in their institutional and accreditational standards (Dilemma 10). Further examination of Southern schools revealed that 4 percent of community colleges, 28 percent of four-year non-master's colleges, 13 percent of four-year master's colleges, and 28 percent of Ph.D. granting four-year universities in the survey did not require that non-speech students take a basic communication course (General Education 1). This has prompted accrediting agencies to include oral competency requirements as part of institutional goals and objectives.

The recent focus on the importance of oral communication should not be a surprise due to its worth. From the President, to the US Congress, to the National Governor's Association, many have recognized the need for a commitment to graduate students able to communicate effectively. While policy-makers and employers have noticed the need, some schools still are struggling with establishing an identity for communication, and more specifically, oral communication.

> Oral communication competence is necessary for personal and vocational success and to foster intellectual and reasoning abilities. Communication scholars have recently focused on defining and measuring oral communication competence in terms of performance, cognitive, and/or motivational/social-interpersonal approaches. (General Education 9)

The following paper will outline the specific requirements for accreditation outlined by the SACS Reaffirmation Committee, address the needs and interests of the various populations at Florida State, and discuss the various options available to FSU.

IDENTIFICATION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

Florida State University is a member school of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). SACS, as an accrediting agency, periodically examines and reviews its member institutions to determine if they continue to meet minimum standards for membership. Increasingly, colleges and universities are finding oral competency requirements included within accreditation standards:

> . . . in its 1989-1990 Criteria for Accreditation . . . 'complete requirements for an associate or baccalaureate degree must include competence in reading, writing, oral communication and fundamental mathematical skills.' They also held that the general education core of colleges and universities 'must provide components designed to ensure competence in reading, writing, oral communication and fundamental mathematical skills.' (General Education 10)

In addition, SACS issued a mandate to its member schools stressing that they attain certain basic levels of communication competence and that this competence must be identifiable. Specifically, ***Recommendation Thirteen***, in a Report of the SACS Reaffirmation Committee, ordered that, "Florida State University incorporate an oral communication competency requirement in all degree programs" (Proposal 1). Further, a 1990 Program Review of Communication Programs in the State University System of Florida revealed a system-wide failing in providing oral competency, with only the University of Central Florida mandating oral communication classes for all undergraduates. A 1988 survey of state universities

in Florida estimated that less than 27 percent of the first time in college students beginning their post secondary education at a state university in Florida will take a course in which the acquisition of speaking and listening skills are principal course objectives (Taylor 5).

> Although the majority of Florida's Community Colleges now require a course where speaking and listening skills are taught, little progress has been made since 1981 to bring the teaching of these skills to Florida university students. Even less has been done to assess student competence in these areas as mandated by the Florida Legislature. (Taylor 1)

The SUS Program Review further cited that,

> . . . none of the programs at the nine institutions at present can satisfy more than a fraction of non-major demands for skills courses in oral communication. . . . and attention should be given to broadening the availability of oral communication skills courses to a greater number of university students in Florida. (Jeffrey 20)

Program review analysis of Florida State revealed that limited resources have hindered the Department of Communication. Noted among its strengths, however, was its faculty-student rapport and compatibility with Florida State's mission of providing a sound basic educational core (Jeffrey 51) .

Currently, while communication majors and minors are required to enroll in a public speaking course, no student at Florida State University has the option in enrolling in a "Fundamentals of Communication" course. The distinction needs to be made that a between a speech course and a fundamentals course as a speech/public speaking course will not necessarily guarantee orally competent graduates. As research demonstrates,

> Although members of the speech discipline generally are pleased to find that a speech course is required of all students in order to fulfill the oral communication competency mandate, any class in speech communication should not be presumed to 'ensure oral communication competency' among students. . . . Since oral communication competency, according to speech researchers, includes many areas of communication, it is unlikely that a course in public speaking, for example, would literally fulfill the mandate (Dilemma 23).

Because of the overwhelming attention to the need to graduate orally competent individuals, change must occur. Before discussing the possible solutions, however, it is first necessary to describe various sub-populations involved in the decision-making.

DISCUSSION OF INTERESTED POPULATIONS

Cognizant of problems associated with change, we have attempted to examine the impact upon the most significant populations affected by this proposal. As Patton and Sawicki stated, "The political process is a fact of life for planners and policy analysts, and the actors in that process must be part of the policy cycle if policies are to be successfully implemented" (366).

While some populations may feel burdened, even frightened of curricular reform, the proposal as a whole will enhance the credibility of the university and strengthen the oral communication abilities of its students. As Guskin emphasized,

> Many people will resist change, any change, and the more significant the change, the greater the resistance. For many, probably most, change is difficult, painful, and an uncertain leap into an unknown future. (29)

We now turn our attention to the various sub-populations.

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools

Among the most important of the interested populations will be SACS. The regional accrediting agency responsible for university accreditation has recommended that FSU implement such a requirement and should welcome the initiative. Previously, the organization has expressed a proactive, yet hands off approach to curricular reform. James T. Rogers, quoted in a personal communication, and cited by the Speech Communication Association, highlighted that, " . . . the faculty of each institution [needs] to assess its own resources and determine the best way to meet these requirements within its stated mission and purpose" (General Education 11). Currently, however, SACS has postured themselves more noticeably, mandating that specific actions be taken by universities in order to renew accreditation.

University Administrators

Among the most difficult populations will be the university administrators. First, administrators are placed in a delicate situation in that they are directed by several factions: the Legislature, SACS, and the faculty. Each faction has different and sometimes competing interests. As a result, administrators are hesitant to hurriedly adopt *any* curricular reform. Everett Rogers, a foremost authority on the diffusion of innovations and the rate of their adoption, describes this dilemma in more detail:

> Change agents face two main problems: (1) their social marginality, due to their position midway between a change agency and their client system, and (2) information overload, the sate of an individual or system in which excessive communication inputs cannot be processed and used, leading to breakdown. (369)

University administrators will be primarily concerned about institutional imbalance and fiscal realities. The proposal will most likely move basic requirements out from the organizational control of the English Department and under the aegis of the Department of Communication. Ensuring that the curricular reform is a smooth one, free of interdepartmental friction, will be key in the implementation process.

Of perhaps a higher concern are the fiscal strains of such a requirement. The required instructional load would be enormous for the Department of Communication. Approximately 2,500 students enter the university as Freshman or First Time In College (FTIC) students every year (Proposal 3). Accordingly, the increased instructional load would necessitate additional funding from the administration. Persuading legislators of the need for such a program is one task, persuading them to allocate additional funding to an already under-funded state university system is another task entirely.

Additionally, administrators are likely to be concerned with the *magnitude* of change, be it non-incremental or incremental. Patton and Sawicki, referring to the work of Steiss and Daneke, describe the natural resistance to non-incremental change:

> . . . non-incremental programs (designed to introduce new programs) require much more change and therefore will be more difficult to implement. Degree of consensus . . . can be based on an evaluation of the attitudes of the actors . . . including the target group, political leaders, administrators, and bureaucrats . . . and other concerned parties such as evaluators and analysts. (310)

Department of Communication

In general, the Department will be interested in an approach which is created in the spirit of its Mission, while at the same time does not overlook the resources available.

> In a restructured environment, it is the school's responsibility to make sure the necessary alignments between curriculum and accountability are in place, that people's roles and responsibilities are designed to serve the school's mission, and that people at appropriate decision points are empowered to do what is best for students. (194)

Currently, the Department of Communication does not have a *Mission Statement*. At best, there is a description of the goals of the College of Communication, outlined by Dean Mayo in the handbook distributed to prospective majors. He stated,

> In the last decade of the 20th century, we are experiencing the convergence and globalization of a vast array of communication media. Knowledgeable observers herald such trends as the advent of an Information Age. Indeed, the acquisition, storage and sharing of information have become the dominant arenas of human employment and productivity in the United States as well as in many other nations, rivaling in economic and social importance of the roles of agriculture and manufacturing in earlier historical eras. . . .
>
> In recent years, the College has averaged approximately 700 majors at the junior and senior levels, 125 master's students and 40 doctoral candidates. The Department of Communication . . . currently offers a variety of course options within the major, including speech,

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> media production, advertising, public relations and general communication studies. (Dean's Letter 1)

In the future colleges will become more interested in upholding the integrity of their individual departments as curricular offerings will influence the accreditation review. As Robert C. Jeffrey stated,

> Accreditation of communication programs should be explored at those institutions in which the programs are not accredited. Many foundations and new groups will not accept grant requests or provide scholarship support for students in non-accredited programs. As schools and departments become more dependent on private gifts, accreditation will become important. (6)

With this in mind, we turn our attention to the sub-populations within the Department.

Faculty

Although there is presently no Mission Statement outlined by the Department, it can be assumed that the conscientious faculty members will be interested in developing the necessary skills of oral competency outlined by the Speech Communication Association. In March of 1995 the SCA published in their newsletter a list of oral competency skills, submitted by Elizabeth A Jones, et. al. in 1994. These skills encompass the following:

Basic Communication Skills - General

Message Development and Organization

Context and Situation Analysis

Message Support

Message Type

Interpersonal and Group Communication - Situation Analysis

Information Exchange

Conversation Management

Communication Codes

Oral Message Evaluation (Spectra 9)

In addition to the attention to oral competency, faculty members will most assuredly be concerned with the strain on financial resources. Given that this is a situation wherein the Legislature has mandated curricular reform, they are not likely to have this as their primary concern. Teaching assistantships, research dollars, and the ability to offer other classes will undoubtedly be affected by the request of SACS.

Teaching Assistants

Regardless of the course of action, teaching assistants will be affected as well. In reviewing the status of the Department of Communication at Florida State University in 1993, Jeffrey noticed that,

> Teaching assistants are very important to the undergraduate teaching function of the Department of Communication. They do much of the upper-division undergraduate instruction as well as teach lower division courses. Evidence available indicates that departmental T.A.s do a solid job of instruction, even though they are not always fully trained before entering the classroom. (45)

As graduate students in communication, it can be assumed that they have similar pedagogical interests as outlined above. On the other hand, given that teaching assistants are graduate students, and that, " . . . Ph.D. students [for instance] receive stipends which are considerably below those offered by comparable programs in other states, some by as much as $2,000 per year" (Jeffrey 45), other interests are likely to precede those associated with pedagogy.

For instance, teaching assistants could find themselves required to do more work, and not necessarily for more money.

The demand to offer more sections of a basic speech course could also mean that fewer graduate courses are offered. The faculty could be forced to teach more undergraduate courses and not necessarily have their salaries augmented. As a result, the number of graduate sections might shrink as the number of undergraduate sections increase. Consequently, graduate students might be asked to take more cognate courses, and/or degree programs would simply take longer to complete.

Teaching assistants are also likely to be concerned with the type of training they are receiving during their graduate work. It is customary to expect that at one point in time teaching assistants will have the experience of *running a class*. Depending upon the chosen course of action, however, teaching assistants might not be afforded that luxury. Consequently, it is possible that prospective graduate students decide to study elsewhere given that they will not receive the teacher training they desire.

Students

Given the diverse nature of the student body, especially at a large research institution, it is not sufficient to discuss all students as they have similar interests. Certainly, the one similarity is that all students want to earn a four-year degree. Beyond that stipulation, however, the unique situations must be examined.

First Time in College

Among the students most impacted will be the more than 2,500 students entering the University for their first taste of post-secondary instruction. As a basic educational requirement, the class will be taken during the first four semesters (preferably in the first two) before the student becomes involved in major classes.

Since the class will most likely replace three required credit hours of English, it will not add to the graduation requirements through additional credit hours.

Students already attending FSU

Students who begin their course of study at Florida State prior to implementing the graduation requirement will be exempt from this course as they began school under a different catalog, essentially under a different contract.

Transfer Students

Students who begin their study at any of the State's other nine institutions or 28 community colleges will have the opportunity to enroll in a similar class to be determined by Departmental faculty and established through the Department of Education's Common Course Numbering System. This will ease in the transfer of credit hours, which also helps to reduce the teaching load at FSU. The transfer system will follow the Colorado State System which requires a fundamental speech communication course of all graduates and mandates that speech credit transfer to its 11 four-year colleges and universities (General Education 19). An academic committee comprised of communication faculty will handle waivers for the course to those students who successfully demonstrate that they have completed a similar course at another institution of higher education.

Communication Majors and Minors

Majors and minors obviously have an interest beyond that of the average FSU student. For these students, the "Fundamentals" course will most likely be their first exposure to the Discipline. Many will make the decision to either continue or end the pursuance of a major or minor depending upon their experience in the first course. It is important when selecting a policy for curricular reform that faculty members design tracks for both majors/minors and non-communication students, so that all undergraduates receive the attention they need.

Students with Special Needs

As with the approach to any curricular reform, it is necessary to consider the students who will have special needs meeting this graduation requirement. Any student with a disability recognized by the ADA will be accommodated on a case-by-case basis. For instance, specific arrangements can be made to offer sign-language interpreters. Also, physical limitations would not in any way affect evaluation of performance.

Beyond ADA standards, it is important for faculty and teaching assistants to remember that many people are mortally afraid of public speaking. To suggest that all students enroll in a communication course without providing some sort of advising for students with a recognized fear would open the Department up to continuous drops in the middle of the semester, not to mention a severe backlog of juniors and seniors who have yet to fulfill the requirement.

Additionally, students requiring remedial education will be accommodated as well. Some students are admitted to the University lacking basic educational and/or language skills, however they have been admitted because they elicit other talents and skills. The students, referred to as "Special Admissions," would hopefully be provided with additional training and/or faculty or peer tutoring.

Considering the interests of the various sub-populations at Florida State, we turn our attention to some of the more common strategies available for meeting the requirements of SACS.

PROPOSALS FOR MEETING THE ORAL COMPETENCY REQUIREMENT

As with any graduation requirement, school administrators usually have the luxury of selecting from a variety of strategies. For instance, at some universities critical thinking requirements can be fulfilled by passing an Introduction to Logic course, an Introduction to Critical Thinking course, or an Argumentation course.

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Similarly, when faced with the notion of preparing orally competent graduates, we can see than colleges and universities have adopted different methods. Obviously, the ultimate selection will depend upon a variety of factors, including interest, resources, and projection of success.

Before describing the specifics of our proposal, it is worthwhile to discuss some of the alternative approaches implemented at colleges and universities across the nation. It is our contention that although these methods have been supported by countless experts in the discipline of Communication, they are inferior to the suggestion outlined below. Specifically, alternatives to a mandatory "Fundamentals" course include the following: *oral communication across the curriculum (OCXC), communication laboratories/interactive video instruction*, and *mass sections*
(a faculty lecturer combined with smaller lab sections run by teaching assistants).

Oral Communication Across the Curriculum (OCXC)

Many colleges and universities explore the possibility of communication across the curriculum. In this program, various departments throughout the college or university will offer *at least* one course designed to train orally competent individuals. Additionally, departments will renovate their mission statements to include the goal of graduating orally competent majors. Therefore, students majoring in a discipline other than Communication need not go outside his/her department in order to fulfill a graduation requirement. Instead, teachers in other disciplines are encouraged to modify content so as to produce orally competent graduates.

> The rationale for an oral communication across the curriculum . . . may be summarized as follows: Business and education leaders nationwide have noted in recent years that college graduates do not

> possess adequate communication skills. Communication skills, written and oral, are best developed if emphasized in a variety of courses. Except for students majoring in communication, most undergraduates take at most one course emphasizing oral communication skills. Those who take one oral communication course may have little or no opportunity for additional structured practice with competent evaluation to reinforce the skills learned in that course. (Cronin & Grice, Oral Communication 5)

There are, of course, benefits to this option. First, for an institution with scarce resources, it is much more reasonable to assume that all departments should share the burden rather than placing the entire task in the hands of the Department of Communication. Second, it is often argued that communication across the curriculum provides students with a chance to apply content to their intended career choice. As Cronin and Grice continue,

> If designed and implemented appropriately, this strategy can provide students multiple opportunities to emphasize speaking and listening in a variety of content areas, with carefully designed assignments and constructive feedback. It can enhance learning in the classroom, as students take a more active role in mastering and communicating course content. (Oral Communication 5)

Finally, this program could provide the Department of Communication with the necessary exposure to affirm that oral communication *is* a valuable skill:

> . . . oral communication across the curriculum programs help students, faculty in other disciplines, administrators, and funding agents become more aware of the value and or academic credibility of the Speech Communication discipline as they undergo direct training

> or observe the importance of oral communication activities for skills improvement and learning. (Oral Communication 10).

Unfortunately, communication across the curriculum can have negative implications as well. First, as Cronin and Grice warn, the exposure to Speech Communication might create an unexpected interest in the discipline, causing students to *cross over* and begin taking more and more communication courses. This could prove problematic if faculty members have not considered an increase in enrollment. Faculty resources could be strained tremendously if the added enrollment was not expected (Oral Communication 10). Even more problematic, is the scenario where students are likely to receive inadequate instruction:

> Most OCXC programs rely on non-speech faculty to provide oral communication instruction in C-I courses. Many non-speech faculty, however, lack sufficient academic preparation to design, implement, and evaluate oral communication activities effectively. (Grice & Cronin, Comprehensive 5)

Communication Laboratories

Colleges and universities may choose to create communication laboratories. Most notably, such laboratories exist at Radford University in Virginia, and at Rhode Island's Speech Communication Center. In these programs, instructors can design their content around the existence of a laboratory.

> By combining interactive video instruction, peer tutoring, and other instructional resources, the OCP Laboratory is able to enhance students' communication competence in non-speech classes. Students in speech courses, especially introductory public speaking classes, also use the laboratory. (Grice & Cronin, Comprehensive 5)

Although there are few publications regarding the use of communication laboratories (Grice & Cronin, Comprehensive 5), preliminary reactions suggest that

if implemented properly, laboratories can succeed in providing the necessary resources for students. Specifically, competent tutors, access to all, and interactive video instruction can be used to tremendous ratio between undergraduates and trained faculty members.

Of course, arguments exist regarding the detriments of communication laboratories as well. For instance, there is still the problem of the untrained faculty member. While the laboratory would provide tutors, they cannot be expected to *pick up the slack* for the untrained faculty (Grice & Cronin, Comprehensive 5). Sometimes being untrained can do more harm than good. Second, a heavy reliance on the communication laboratory might severely decrease the face-to-face interaction between teacher and student. To be successful, school administrators would have to strike a delicate balance so as to not simply 'leave it all up to technology.' Finally, as discussed earlier, there is not much literature on communication laboratories, and few colleges have adopted this strategy (Grice & Cronin, Comprehensive 5). Without a substantial amount of empirical evidence regarding its success, it is risky to devote so much time and money to this precarious solution.

Mass Sections

Colleges and universities might adopt a program wherein students enroll in a large section, taught by a faculty member, and are then required to register for a laboratory, taught by a teaching assistant. Here, the faculty member's main responsibility is to lecture, and the teaching assistant's responsibility is to provide guidance and feedback/grading regarding speeches and other assignments. This proposal, in fact, is currently being considered by the Department of Communication at Florida State University.

Undoubtedly, this proposal is very attractive due primarily to fiscal constraints. This program would be a substantially lower strain on departmental resources than implementing a single required course for all undergraduates. In response to the 1989 SACS request, the Department of Communication estimated that to provide **enough** sections for all students each year, the total cost to the Department would reach $284,000 in the initial year:

> Estimated number of students needing courses: 2,500
>
> 100 sections - 50 per semester
>
> 25 instructors needed, each teaching two sections/semester
>
> (Proposal 3)

Moreover, the Department's estimate indicated that, "It should be mentioned that the critical issue of space - classrooms and TA offices - is not addressed. Furthermore, the initial cost estimate does not include tuition waivers for the teaching assistants" (Proposal). Clearly, the Department of Communication must examine resources available in selecting a plan.

On the other hand, financial strains are not the only consideration when facing curriculum reform. One of the most noticeable disadvantages to a mass section approach is the lack of continuity for the students. In this strategy, students are asked to process one person's method of lecturing and another person's method of instruction. In the process, students might feel disoriented at best and consequently the goal of creating orally competent individuals in never achieved. As Cuban explains, content is not the only issue here:

> Worse still, curricular reformers ignore the power of pedagogy. They believe that content is more important than teaching. They are wrong. At the heart of schooling is the personal relationship between teacher and students that develops over matters of content. (184)

The lack of continuity might make the student-teacher relationship and the educational process near to impossible to establish and maintain.

Flannery explained the importance of familiarity with the students as a direct link to maintaining authority in the classroom:

> The teacher should be cognizant of the traditional mechanisms of control and authority present in the college classroom—mechanisms that favor individual over group effort, competition over cooperation, and teacher-directed over student-directed learning. The instructor must consciously construct an atmosphere that reverses or at least modifies the probable effects of the these structures that can affect the collaborative process in negative ways. Simply ignoring these structures is not enough. (21)

Additionally, the mass section approach places new demands on teaching assistants. Currently, teaching assistants, for the most part, maintain autonomy over the content of their course. With this proposal, however, teaching assistants would be directed to guide and evaluate under the auspices of the mass section lecturer. If not assimilated, teaching assistants could find it difficult to adopt this new mode of instruction.

> . . . change is not merely an event, but a process. To assimilate innovations, teachers need opportunities to reformulate their ideas about the teaching-learning process, just as the creator of the innovation underwent mental restructuring in developing the innovation. (Englert, Tarrnat, & Rozendal 443).

If the Department of Communication suddenly mandates that teaching assistants take on a new role, there could be some new found resentment, not to mention role conflict.

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Finally, teaching assistants might find it impossible to enforce the standards established by the lecturing faculty member. Teaching assistants already are at a certain disadvantage due to the perception that they are not *real* teachers. K. David Roach, an assistant professor in the Department of Communication Studies at West Virginia University, described this phenomenon in a 1991 article discussing a statistical analysis of graduate teachers' use of behavior alteration techniques:

> Another area of difficulty for GTA's, related specifically to instructor power, lies in perceived credibility and authority. Many, though not all, GTA's enter graduate program immediately after completing a B.A. or B.S. degree. Because of this, there is usually a small age and maturation differential between the GTA's and the students they are teaching. This can lead to substantial problems in classroom management. Additionally, problems may emerge because GTA's do not possess the same degree of legitimate authority and control over their classes as do university professors. The authority role of an instructor is often a new role for many GTA's and, consequently, many of them are unsure and awkward about its enactment. (179)

Although any of the strategies would most likely include GTA's teaching classes, the specific disadvantage to mass sections faculty members are perceived as more official than GTA's. Students are more likely to respect the faculty member more than the GTA.

If students see teaching assistants receiving instructions from the faculty member in charge of the class, the perception of authority is lessened for the GTA's as they are seen as on a similar authority/hierarchical level as the student. After all, they are not perceived as the one in charge of the grading. This can have damaging results to the educational process, where students attempt to pit faculty

member against teaching assistant in an attempt to raise their grade, receive extensions, etc.

After scrutinizing and weighing the three previously discussed strategies, we have concluded that while each has its own unique merits, none adequately meet the intended goals of providing orally competent students at Florida State. With this in mind, we offer an alternative strategy, one that mandates each undergraduate complete one course as discussed below.

THE REQUIRED COURSE: 'FUNDAMENTALS OF COMMUNICATION'

For the purposes of meeting the requirements outlined by SACS, we suggest that the Department of Communication revise its course offerings to include one new course, effective for the next catalogue year. This course, entitled, "Fundamentals of Communication," will be a necessary graduation requirement for all students entering Florida State under the new catalogue.

This strategy will include the following:

- An oral communication class will be required of all students prior to graduation.
- The Department of Communication will be the university branch responsible for the administration and instruction of the course.
- The course will be taught primarily to a native freshman audience. Opportunities to enroll in the class will exist on a limited basis for those of Sophomore status or above.
- A student may elect to exempt the coursework in favor of an examination.

"Fundamentals of Communication" will be taught as a hybrid course, including four necessary elements: *general communication theory, interpersonal communication, group communication*, and *public speaking*. Although teaching assistants will teach the bulk of these courses, faculty members might also be expected to teach a section or two, depending upon the resources. The specifics of

the pedagogical goals of the course will be identified by a committee comprised equally of faculty members and experienced teaching assistants.

Students will have two options, a two- or three-credit course. Majors and minors in Communication will be required to enroll in the three-credit course and be taught by faculty. Other students will have the option of the two credit hour class. Majors and minors have a vested interest in enrolling in the three-credit course. First, there will a more intense examination of the subject matter which will serve to better prepare the students to tackle upper-level courses. Additionally, mandating that majors and minor enroll in the three-credit course will mean one more credit toward the Departmental requirement for major credit hours, encouraging expedient graduation. Finally, more time means more content. If all majors and minors are required to enroll in the three-credit course, faculty members can assume that after the completion of that course, *all* students are at a certain level.

"Fundamentals in Communication," as taught by individual instructors, offers several pedagogical benefits. First, it is the preferred method of instruction. As Taylor stated,

> When students have the opportunity to take one or more courses in speaking and listening, competency in these skills can be assessed as part of the classroom activities. This preference for local assessment is supported by Florida Commissioner of Education Castor who has asserted that speaking and listening skills 'can best be taught and monitored by individual teachers in each institution.' (5)

Second, while this proposal indeed presents financial pressures to the Department, it best maintains the spirit of the Discipline. There are too many problems which arise when there are untrained instructors, heavy reliance on video,

or role conflict in a performance-based discipline. A uniform class, taught by individual instructors, will reach the goals outlined by SACS while at the same time preserve the educational integrity of the teachers.

Finally, the flexibility of a two-credit option for non-Communication students will drastically reduce the teaching assistants needed to fulfill the teaching obligations. Most likely, the majority of non-Communication students will register for the two-credit course, because that will be all that they can spare out of their Departmental obligations. Analysis of military strategy has revealed that:

> Any attempt to determine a unique best solution to a problem involving a large number of uncertain factors, some of which may be under the influence of other decision makers, is doomed to failure. The aim instead should be to search out or design alternatives that perform well or even close to the best for what appears to be the most likely set of consequences, and from such alternatives, whenever it can be done, select the one that gives some sort of reasonable satisfactory performance under the more likely and even more pessimistic circumstances. (Patton et al. 316)

Consequently, instead of three teaching assistants to teach 6 courses, the Department would only need two. While this proposal would not eliminate the financial strain, it will be considerably less.

CONCLUSION

The Discipline of Communication continues to gain in establishing its identity and credibility as a worthwhile discipline throughout academia. Not only is Communication now respected as a discipline by departments, colleges, and school administrators, but it is also being recognized on a regional level by noteworthy

accrediting agencies as a necessary component of the undergraduate general education requirements in an academy of higher learning.

The inclusion of a mandatory fundamental communication class at Florida State University would be pan-beneficial. Not only would the University produce graduates better prepared to handle the complexities of today's communication age, but it would recognize the benefits of meeting the accreditational standards established by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

William J. Banach provides a succinct summary:

> On occasion the kaleidoscope of change comes into focus. When it does it's clear that the global economy will define the power of nations, determine the nature of work, and affect the quality of life everywhere. Adequately preparing our students dictates that we must gather our thoughts and operationalize a syllabus without delay. (11)

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